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ABSTRACT

Issues and strategies to enhance the growth of undergraduate social work education programs are described. The six issues discussed apply to either undergraduate programs that are autonomous social work programs (such as departments of social work) or to programs located in sociology departments, combined with sociology, or combined with other social sciences. The paper recommends that in order to survive, administrators of social education programs need to: (1) legitimize social work as a social science, based on the premise that social work is derived from theoretical and applied research; (2) recognize social work as a profession that operates from both an interdisciplinary base and from its own theoretical and conceptual base in attempting planned social change; (3) offer social work courses to undergraduate majors from other departments as well as to related professional and allied health disciplines to encourage more students to enroll in social work courses; (4) develop a limited number of graduate social work courses to support closely related graduate programs in social science; (5) develop and implement both continuing education and off-campus programs to recruit students from other social service agencies; and (6) establish the autonomy of undergraduate social work programs. These recommendations, which are currently implemented by North Texas State University, offer pragmatic suggestions for improving undergraduate social work education and ensuring its future survival. (LH)

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SOME ISSUES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE SURVIVAL OF UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THE 1980's

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SOME ISSUES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE SURVIVAL OF

UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THE 1980's

Introduction

Among the most difficult issues facing undergraduate social work education programs in the 1980's is the issue of their survival. The problem of survival is certainly not limited to undergraduate programs since graduate programs face the same predicament. In a broader context, graduate and undergraduate programs in the humanities and social sciences have fallen upon trying times as well. The crux of the problem for social work education resides in the process of recruitment and retention of competent and quality students. Mary Ann Quaranta, President of the National Association of Social Workers, Inc., described the parameters of this problem succinctly in a recent memorandum to Deans and Directors of B.S.W. and M.S.W. programs.

> At the recent Council on Social Work Education annual meeting, Chauncey Alexander and I met with the Admissions' Directors of various schools of social work. At that time, we had confirmation of the increasing problem of student recruitment and the emergency nature of the problem for some schools.
>
> The matter of student recruitment is complicated by such factors as the public's perception of the job opportunities and salaries in social work, the significance of the social workers role and responsibility, the type and quality of applicants, the student-support possibilities and others.[1]

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[1]Mary Ann Quaranta, "Recruitment to the Social Work Profession," Memorandum, National Association of Social Worker, Inc. (March 29, 1982).

The purpose of this paper is to describe some educational issues that undergraduate social work education programs need to consider, and to also describe some strategies for use in "gaudeamus academe" that may increase the probability of survival and, perhaps, enhance the growth of undergraduate programs. More specifically, this paper will consider:

1. The issue of social work as a social science,
2. Social work courses as service or supportive courses for other undergraduate majors.
3. The development by undergraduate programs of a limited number of selective graduate social work courses which could serve as supportive courses for graduate programs in closely related social science and professional programs.
4. Continuing education and off-campus social work educational programs as means of student recruitment and retention.
5. Autonomy of undergraduate social work programs and independent administrative auspices.

There are any number of additional issues that impinge upon undergraduate programs. The intent of this paper is not to attempt to cover the entire list. The issues that the writers have chosen to cover represent, in their experiences, some of the key considerations.

An additional caveat is in order: the issues and strategies described apply most closely either to undergraduate programs that are autonomous social work programs, i.e., departments of social work

or to programs located in sociology departments, combined with sociology, or combined with other social sciences. In the main, these are departments or programs that are administratively located in colleges of arts and sciences. Further, these issues and strategies are not intended to apply to programs which are administratively located in graduate schools of social work.

Social Work as a Social Science

A key issue that undergraduate programs must face is the issue of social work as a social science. Some academicians tend to view social work as a technical or vocational field. Others uphold the sophism that social sciences are "pure sciences," that is, based upon theoretical research, while social work is an applied field based, at best, upon qualitative research models. Undergraduate social work programs must confront and resolve this issue in order to promote their survival. The argument needs to be made, usually at the level of the dean or the academic vice president, but sometimes with the president of the university, that social work: (1) has an intrinsic theoretical and conceptual body of knowledge, most of which has been derived from both theoretical and applied research efforts; (2) that social work is interdisciplinary in nature, as are the social sciences, and (3) that social work is a profession in the sense that it operates from both an interdisciplinary base and from its own theoretical and conceptual base in attempting planned social changes. An analogy that could be useful in illustrating this point was noted by H.

Wayne Johnson: "Sociology is to social work approximately what biology is to medicine".[2] Interestingly, there is historical suppport for including social work as a social science. Edwin R.A. Seligman in his introduction to the Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, defines the social sciences as. . ."those mental or cultural sciences which deal with the activities of the individual as a member of a group".[3] Furthermore, he includes social work among. . ."the purely social sciences".[4]

In the experience of the authors, the case for social work as a social science can be clearly demonstrated. Difficulties, if they occur, have to do with developing justifications for social work practice courses and, of course, for field work classes and experiences as social science offerings. When social work courses become identified as social sciences, a certain amount of academic respectability comes with that symbolism, ard the possibility of using these courses for social science credit and/or for courses of minor study in other disciplines becomes a reality. Legitimizing social work as a social science is a crucial first step in the survival and growth of undergraduate social work programs.

Social Work as a Service or Supportive Discipline

Undergraduate social work education programs operate in academia

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[2]H. Wayne Johnson, The Social Services - An Introduction, (Itasca, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1982), p.12

[3]Edwin R.A. Seligman, "What are the Social Sciences," in Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Volume I, ed. Edwin R.A. Seligman (New York: The MacMillam Company, 1967), p.3.

[4]Ibid., p.5.

essentially as entrepreneurial enterprises. Social work courses are generally not required by other disciplines for their majors. The programs experience profit or loss according to the vicissitudes of the academic free market place. But the reverse is often true for other disciplines. For example, in many combined sociology-social work departments, social work majors are required to take several sociology courses, but sociology majors are not required to take social work courses. The same condition occurs in other disciplinary areas partly because accreditation policies require that the programs be built upon a liberal arts and sciences base. This "sweetheart" deal results in social work programs subsidizing student enrollments in other departments while receiving no reciprocity. Essentially, then, social work programs tend to rise or fall covaringly with the extent to which they have been able to attract majors. At the present time dependence entirely upon majors, which is an entrepreneurial model of social work education, is a "doomsday" script. This is particularly true for the short-run future because current neo-conservative political attitudes consisting of so-called "supply side economics" and "the new Federalism" have resulted in our current major recession, historically high levels of unemployment, particularly in public social welfare servcies, and major cutbacks in federal funding for social work education and training.

Some strategies for survival need to be considered. First, when the social work program has leverage, such as in the case of disciplines where student enrollment in their classes is marginal, and social work

student enrollment in their classes would "make"* the class, social work programs must insist that a minimal number of social work courses be required for majors in these other disciplines. These disciplines almost invariably include: sociology, anthropology, history, English and, in some cases, political science, economics, and psychology.

Second, social work programs need to develop and formalize interdisciplinary relationships with other departments and disciplines and, in particular, with related professional and allied health disciplines, in order that their students might be required or encouraged to take certain social work courses either for social science credit, as a minor field, or for double or dual-degree majors. These disciplines include, among others: psychology, sociology, criminal justice, rehabilitation services, health education, physical education, recreation, leisure studies, social gerontology, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, and counseling and guidance.

At North Texas State University we in the social work program have maintained our entreprenuerial approach, albeit with some decline in enrollment, while actively pursuing and achieving some modicum of success as a service discipline. This has been particularly true in the case of our relationships with psychology, criminal justice, rehabilitation services, and health education.

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*By definition the term "make" at Texas state universities means an enrollment of no fewer than ten students in a undergraduate-level course and no fewer than five students in a graduate-level course.

Undergraduate Programs and Graduate-Level Social Work Courses

The argument for the survival of undergraduate social work programs predicated upon evolving as service disciplines for other undergraduate departments pertains, as well, in the case of graduate-level education. At the onset it should be clear that the writers are not suggesting that undergraduate programs develop an M.S.W. degree program. Clearly, given the circumstances today in higher education, good educational-managerial sense would mitigate against this possibility. The suggestion offered, instead, is for undergraduate programs to develop and implement a limited number of graduate-level courses that could serve as first minors or as collateral fields of study in other disciplines. The intent is not to develop courses that would duplicate graduate social work methods courses. The types of courses being suggested are those which, at higher levels of abstraction and conceptualization than are generally available at the undergraduate level, will acquaint graduate students in allied health and other human services field with the scope, issues, problems, organization, and array of services, and specifically social work services, extant in public social welfare institutions and in the private social service sectors.

As these writers view it, the development of graduate-level social work courses is a key factor in survival. At state colleges and universities, graduate courses generally are formula-funded by state legislatures at higher fiscal rates and require fewer students to "make." Ipso facto, more revenues are generated for the university and increased teaching

opportunities for social work faculty are created by graduate courses. There are some "educational elitism" notions that would operate as well. Undergraduate social work faculty could acquire graduate faculty status, as well as increased opportunities for research, professional mobility, and departmental and university political-administrative power. At a large urban university of 18,000 students, such as North Texas State, wherein 40 percent of the students are graduate students, the importance of being a part of the graduate tier of education is, obviously, a sine qua non.

The process and tactics of implementing graduate-level social work courses can be both frustrating and politically intense. Obviously, questions of territoriality will emerge. Other disciplines have to be persuaded that these courses, at the worst,will have a neutral impact on their enrollments, and at the best, that the courses will enhance the quality and marketability of their graduates. An interim step in the process of obtaining graduate courses in social work (or perhaps the only step possible depending upon circumstances) is for the social work faculty to obtain joint or dual appointments in other departments so that they can teach graduate-level social work courses under another department's auspice and course nomenclature. At North Texas State University social workers have been successful in obtaining some joint appointments, particularly in sociology and in the health education division in the college of education. Additionally, support and encouragement of our actions to develop graduate courses have been received from psychology,

economics, criminal justice, rehabilitation services, physical education, recreation, and social gerontology. All of these disciplines award graduate degrees at the masters and/or doctoral-levels at our institution.

Continuing Education and Off-Campus Offerings

Undergraduate social work programs need to develop and implement both continuing education and off-campus education programs for purposes of survival and growth in the 1980's. The writers believe that these types of programs will experience a great deal of growth in the future.

Specifically, with reference to continuing education programs, undergraduate social work programs need to meet the responsibility of providing additional education and training for B.S.W.'s now in practice. Continuing education programs can be administered by the undergraduate programs solely, or in conjunction with social service agencies. Barbara R. Wheeler's point about continuing education for M.S.W.'s reported at the Fifth Annual Symposium on Issues in Social Work Education held at the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Utah in 1974, is germane to undergraduate programs as well.

> Agencies and Graduate Schools of Social Work have the responsibility of providing sources for further education of social workers on an on-going basis. These sources such as: classes, workshops, symposia, seminars, etc., need to be projected out into communities located miles away from the school community as well as offered at the local school.[5]

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[5] Barbara R. Wheeler, "Competence as Viewed by an Alumnus," in Assuring Practitioner Competence: Whose Responsibility? ed. Dean H. Hepworth (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah, Graduate School of Social Work, 1974), p. 31.

Recently, the Texas state legislature passed a social work certification bill. This bill certifies social work practice at three levels of practice including the B.S.W.-level. Contained in the legislation is the requirement of continuing education as a prerequisite for re-certification. The opportunity for undergraduate social work programs in Texas to become providers of continuing education resources for B.S.W.'s is apparent. We at North Texas State University intend to seize this opportunity. Efforts underway or completed, nationally, for certification and/or licensing of social work practice will tend to promote the survival and growth of undergraduate programs in the future if the programs learn to "market" their education resources through continuing education programs.

At our university, we in the Social Work Program are even more excited, however, about the future potential of our part-time undergraduate social work program. The leadership and development of this program is chiefly attributable to Fannie Belle Gaupp,* a member of the faculty. This program allows full-time employees of the Texas State Department of Human Resources, and persons from other social service agencies, principally from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center in Dallas, Texas, to have access to all of the required upper-division courses in the social work program through evening courses offered in their agencies.

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*For a comprehensive description of the North Texas State University Social Work Program's off-campus educational program the reader is directed to: Fannie Belle Gaupp, "Part-Time Undergraduate Social Work Education: An Urban Area Model," paper presented at the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, New York, March 7, 1982. (Preconference Symposia on Part-Time Social Work Education).

This means that it is possible for these non-degreed personnel who work in social agencies, or persons who have a non-social work baccalaureate degree, to continue to work full-time while taking lower-division courses in local community colleges, followed by North Texas State University upper-division required courses, to culminate in the receipt of the B.S.W. degree. This program has proven to be extremely helpful to many social service agency employees, particularly females and ethnic minority persons, who have never had an opportunity to secure advanced educational credentialing because they could not afford to resign from their jobs in order to pursue an academic degree.

Our off-campus program has been in existence for almost five years, but most recently, the program has been difficult to keep "afloat" because of low enrollment. We believe this is due in part to two factors: (1) the added demands at the workplace which lessens the time and energy workers have available for evening classes, (2) the economic situation which makes it less feasible for workers to pay the costs of tuition and fees for coursework.

In the past, these off-campus courses have often helped us when some "softening" of our on-campus course enrollments occurred. Off-campus courses can have appeal to a large pool of experienced social service adult learners. Survival and enhancement of undergraduate programs may, in the future, depend upon student cohorts from this group.

Autonomy and Independent Auspices

Undergraduate social work programs will fare best when they have their own autonomy and control over curriculum, budget, personnel, and promotion and tenure decisions. Such autonomy may require separation from other disciplines, at least in terms of administrative auspices. These authors are not suggesting that autonomy can only be found in one particular administrative arrangement, nor that separation is a necessary requirement for autonomy. However, disciplines combined together for administrative purposes or convenience seem more likely to suffer some degree of lost identity and integrity, and are more likely to have secondary status to the majority discipline.

In departments where social work is not the majority discipline, there can be blocks in curriculum development, less-than-equitable allocations of budgetary resources, and less-than-"ideal" peer reviews ("ideal" meaning colleagues familiar with the discipline and engaged in similar activities). Combined arrangements also can lead to conflicts over administrative-management responsibilities of various program directors and departmental chairpersons. More importantly, "combined" programs generally are viewed as one department and often have to reconcile varying positions and goals in their communications to higher authorities. It is extremely difficult to represent the varying interests without either "watering down" the communication or allowing a "majority rule" approach, both of which can lead to feelings of inadequate representation and confused communication.

Although there are at least nine different types of university/ college administrative auspices for C.S.W.E. accredited social work programs, the trend is toward autonomous departments or autonomous academic structures such as divisions, centers or institutes. Such arrangements lend themselves to (1) increased visibility in the university community which can lead to improved student recruitment (2) more direct lines of authority and communication and accountability and (3) a sense of unity and administrative support which can improve program development and faculty morale.

At North Texas State University, our social work program has been part of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Until recently, social work was not included in the departmental title. Sociology has been the majority discipline in terms of the number of faculty members, currently with sociology having 9.5 positions compared to anthropology with 2.5 and social work with 3.25. The departmental chairperson has always been a sociologist.

Over the years, there have been the usual struggles regarding various program interests and departmental decisions. There have also been the expected concerns about program representation, interests and survival. Out of this struggle came a departmental charter outlining autonomy for the three programs. The charter was developed by representatives from each of the three disciplines and was approved by the office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences and ratified by the departmental faculty. In theory it provided a viable framework for the operation of the department while at the same time allowing the programs to have relative autonomy regarding

curriculum, personnel and budgetary matters.

Each program had its own program director and the programs were connected by a single executive committee consisting of the three directors and a departmental chairperson. The departmental chairperson served as the primary administrative officer and overseer for the department and its budget. This arrangement did not guarantee the ideal of program autonomy, and perhaps it was unrealistic to expect it to do so. In any case, efforts began to develop other administrative auspices which showed more promise for perceived autonomy.

Currently at North Texas State University, the three programs are autonomous units and each program director reports directly to the Dean of Arts and Sciences. The department as a whole has divided its resources among the three programs and the program directors now have separate budgets, have direct communication with the dean, and represent their separate disciplines. Program independence is not departmental status, but it represents autonomy for administrative and operational purposes.

Although this arrangement no doubt has some disadvantages, it appears to be one alternative to dealing with issues of independence and survival. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this administrative arrangement or the impact it has upon the department as a whole. For us in the social work program, it has lessened to some degree the in-house rivalry for scarce resources, has given us a direct say in educational issues as they relate to the social work program, and in our judgment has served to help faculty in all three programs to feel they are adequately and clearly represented.

Reflections

This paper was not intended by the writers to be merely an exercise in futurist thinking. Hopefully, the paper contains some concrete and pragmatic suggestions for the future survival of undergraduate social work education programs in the decade of the 1980's. Some of the suggestions, no doubt, are already being implemented by some programs. Other suggestions probably need to be implemented by many programs. If the suggestions for the enrollment and retention of students seem somewhat Machiavellian, this was not the primary intention of the writers. However, no apologies will be put forth because today's higher education ethos is very different from what it was only a short time ago. Therefore, we need to structure our actions along realpolitik lines. We have to "market" our profession and our educational products and resources. The importance and value of social work education and social work as a profession is unquestioned. We only need to share our riches.

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